

Canadian Urban Development

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I am overstating the case. Still, I see something interesting in the course of American historiographical development, which, as usual, we largely follow: often to our profit, but not always. Once the land of the frontierists, of Turner and his successors, it now appears that the republic, in its historiography, has swung more and more wholeheartedly to the urbanists--though that very division between the country and the town, unless it is only my perception, represents an unfortunately restrictive pursuit of ineffectual efficiency. It would be odd if Canada, where historians have till recently worked hard to show the limits of frontierism, should instead recall its historical meanings and relate them more fully to current research in urban history. It might be odd; but it would be good! Again Canada would be avoiding American excesses and proving the value of the sensible middle way. But as usual, only Canadians would know, and would have to enjoy their characteristic limited satisfaction at being better, though unrecognized.

J.M.S. Careless

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CANADIAN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In a paper presented at the World Congress of Sociology in 1966 I argued that while the ecological structure of the Canadian society appeared urban, the society as such remained still essentially rural. The point there that was made was that the large influx of population into urban centres from disadvantaged rural areas had led to the creation on the periphery of the urban community of a society in which the population, in outlook, way of life, aspirations and values was no different from the population back in rural areas. The industrial communities of Northern Ontario and Quebec were offered as an example of where within the confines of the company town a highly urban type of society developed but where, outside these confines, there had grown up large sprawling shacktown type areas housing a population which had moved

off the marginal farm lands of the north to seek employment in the industrial centres but which in no way had become integrated into the industrial-urban society.

It was argued that the character of development in Northern Ontario and Quebec exemplified the character of development which had taken place in Canada generally. The Canadian urban centre as it had developed over the years had about it much of the character of the company town. It was in these urban centres that were based the major economic enterprises related to the exploitation of the country's resources--the fisheries, the fur trade, the timber trade, mining, the pulp and paper industry. Outside these urban centres were situated not only that large rural population in the country which, apart from Western Ontario and the Western Prairies, played little part in the wealth producing enterprises of the country but as well were situated a large part of the work force of these major economic enterprises themselves. The development of manufacturing in Central Canada did lead to something of a change in the ecological structure of the Canadian community where now those workers who were directly involved in the industrial process became housed within the confines of the urban community but given the still heavy dependence of the country upon resource development there remained a large portion of the work force situated at least on the periphery of urban centres if not beyond. Can today the worker for the woodlands department of a pulp and paper company or, for that matter, the truck driver for a large urban based trucking firm, be described as an urban person when such a worker, moving out of the country in his search for employment, remains still in a community essentially rural in character whether it be what once was a farm settlement in Northern Ontario or a shacktown growing up beyond the reach of a city like Toronto?

Such was the argument developed in the paper referred to. From a different vantage point, something of the same sort of argument was developed by R.A. Lucas in his *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*. To Lucas what determined the urban character of a population was essentially the size of the community lived in. By proposing that communities with a population of 30,000 or less lack those qualities that make them urban,

Lucas comes to the conclusion that about one-half the population of Canada should properly be considered as non-urban.

The trouble with the Lucas line of argument, or of mine, is that it turns upon a particular definition of rural and urban. A few years ago Philip Garigue, in quarrelling with the presumed description of early French Canada by Everett Hughes and Horace Miner as a folk or peasant society argued that because of the settlement of the population along rangs, or streets, what developed was a structure of social relationships that was essentially urban. There was some point to Garigue's argument, however ridiculous might appear the description of the early farm population of French Canada as a population that was urban.

What appears to me to have bedevilled much of the discussion about the characteristics of different kinds of societies is the effort to apply to them the label of urban or rural. Sociologists have long been caught up in this effort to set over rural against urban, but now historians, with their talk about "urban history", appear to be falling into the same trap. This session is described as a debate on urban development as if one could talk about a development that is urban as over against some other kind.

I would refer back again to the argument of Lucas that communities of less than 30,000 people did not possess those qualities that made them urban and ask the question whether these so-called urban qualities were possessed by the heavily populated down-town slums of the large city or, indeed, of those large working class residential areas of the city populated by a rural reared people either from overseas or from country districts in Canada. By pursuing Lucas' definition of urban, or by going back to that of Robert Park or Louis Wirth, one would be forced to the conclusion that only a very small segment of the population of the urban community is really urban. What is really urban, in other words, is that urban population that is middle class.

That in effect was the position I took in the paper referred to above. The plant managers, engineers, accountants and skilled workers in an industrial enterprise like the Spruce Falls pulp and paper mill in Kapuskasing were truly urban, while the population outside the company

town in shacktown communities like Brunetville or Val Ablert, employed by the company, remained in a world that was rural. I was correct in arguing that little if anything had happened to those people of Northern Quebec and Ontario who had moved off the marginal farms of the North to the shacktowns that had grown up around the industrial towns of the North. But how correct was I in applying to these people the label rural? If pressed I would find myself in the same position that Lucas would find himself in, restricting the term urban to the middle class society of the urban community.

The easy escape from such a dilemma would appear to be found in the resort to a social class terminology. Somewhere back about the 1950's American sociologists discovered social class. Hitherto they had talked about rural and urban, or about race or ethnicity. Now came into vogue talk about the life-styles of social classes and in particular the life-style of the working class. In a book on juvenile delinquency, Albert Cohen sought to demonstrate the close relationship between delinquent forms of behaviour and the life style and values of the urban working class. As a person who had grown up in the large city and made the city his area of study, Cohen could knowingly and perceptively talk about the way in which the city's working class population lived, what were the beliefs and values it held, what were its ambitions and disillusionments. As one, however, who had grown up in a rural community, I could not help but feel, on reading Cohen's book, that he was talking as much about my people as his. Indeed, I found myself arguing that it was not the life style of the working class that Cohen was talking about but the life style of a rural society transferred to the big city, whether by immigrants from rural Southern Italy or my migrants to the city from rural areas in the country. Such were Herbert Gans' urban villagers of Boston. Whether the population was first generation, or second or third, the life styles of a people persisted where little occurred to change its economic state. It was only those rural reared persons who moved up from the working class to a middle class social position who were able to shed their rural heritage.

Such an argument sounds convincing except that it leaves one with the uncomfortable feeling of ending up where one began. That society

which is not middle class becomes defined thus as rural. In these terms, what does one really mean by rural? If, as is here argued, Cohen's analysis of the life style of the working class reads strikingly like the textbook analysis of the life style of a rural people it would appear evident that the style of life that is being talked about is that of people who cannot afford to live like middle class people. John Porter was on sound ground when he based his definition of social class upon income. It makes little sense to talk about the well-to-do farm family of Western Ontario as rural and the down-town slum family of a large city like Toronto as urban. What we are really talking about are people who are rich and people who are poor.

This is not to suggest that we can neatly compartmentalize the population of any society, and more particularly ours, into rich and poor. The Marxist would like to think it can be done in terms of the ownership of the means of production. Sociologists have long struggled to find ways of fitting people into categories. If rural and urban fails to work, or lower, middle and upper class, the temptation is to proceed, in the manner of Lloyd Warner, and end up with twenty-seven social classes or, indeed, as many as fifty-four. There are as few returns from a class analysis of society as there are from an analysis in terms of rural and urban.

In the effort to escape from the pit-falls of a social class or urban-rural type of analysis of society it has now become fashionable to look at the structure of economic, political and social relationships of a community within a metropolis-hinterland framework. For those left wing ideologists who have been compelled to recognize the inadequacies of the Marxist conception of a society structured in terms of a dominant capitalist class and an oppressed working class, the metropolis-hinterland thesis makes a strong appeal, particularly here in Canada where it can be linked to a Canadian nationalism which sees in American imperialism and the multi-national corporation a power which threatens the very existence of the nation.

I am not about to argue that decisions made on Bay Street, or still further removed on Wall Street, do not have an effect on the lives

of residents of Northern Alberta or of eastern New Brunswick. The trouble with the metropolis-hinterland type of analysis, however, arises from the effort to set one type of community over against another. Power does tend to become concentrated, in the head of the household as over against the other members of the family, in the old established and well-to-do families of the village as over against those village residents who depend upon uncertain forms of employment, in the country town as over against the surrounding country-side, in a city like Toronto or Montreal as over against a town like Parry Sound or St. Hyacinthe. It seems to me it serves no useful purpose to work with such categories or concepts as metropolis and hinterland when what is metropolis can also be considered hinterland and what is hinterland can also be considered metropolis.

What we are really talking about is the distribution of power just as, in the reference to life styles, we are talking about the distribution of wealth. We do not like, at least some of us, the way power is distributed, or wealth, and thus the temptation becomes great to build a simplified model of society which appears to explain, and by inference condemn, how power and wealth become unevenly distributed in society. Such was the appeal of the Marxist model, and such is the appeal of the metropolis-hinterland model.

This paper leads to no clear-cut, obvious conclusion. It was not intended to, written as it was as a contribution to a debate on Canadian urban development. I suppose one conclusion does emerge from the paper and that is that this very debate makes little sense when little sense can be made out of such terms as urban and rural, or metropolis and hinterland. Yet many of us, including myself, will probably go on using such terms because we must find some way of indicating what it is we are talking about. I see nothing wrong in labelling a city like Halifax an urban community or a metropolis or a farm area like Grand Prairie in Alberta a rural community or a hinterland providing there is not read into such terms a special quality of life style or power. It is here where we seek to use such terms to describe a whole category of social life that trouble develops.

S.D. Clark